ISSN 0712-7774

CEREBUS GOING HOME 2

233
AUG

CEREBUS
NO. 233 AUGUST 1998

STANDUP

Child-proof cigarette lighters. Now there's an idea that got passed into law somewhere before anyone asked me how I would vote. I can sort of understand it in Canada, but how the heck did it happen in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Self-Indulgent? Child-proof lighters. What about those of us who don't have kids? Why are we having to push in those little idiot buttons? Was this really that big a problem in the first place? How many kids go up in flames every year?

Child-proof cigarette lighters. Hey, maybe they could make some of the old lighters again and just really, really control them. Like, you have to have a license to get a real Bic lighter. Maybe a ten-day waiting period and no criminal priors on your record. I don't know. Maybe we could all go out to some arena somewhere and you could have all these guys standing by with fire extinguishers, and if you can light ten cigarettes in a row without setting fire to your hair or your clothes, then you get the license for the real Bic.

Child-proof cigarette lighters.

Give me strength.

Hey, Janet Reno. Here's a great idea. How about the ATFCL? "Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Cigarette Lighters." Hey, now we're happening. No way that we can hurt ourselves now. We've just received word that there's some nut down in Texas who's holed up in some compound, and he's stockpiling non-child-proof cigarette lighters. He must have ten thousand of the bastards by now. Here's the plan. Nobody goes in and nobody leaves, okay? If he makes any sudden moves, shoot first and ask questions later.

Child-proof cigarette lighters. I mean, you've gotta love it.

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GOING HOME

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(Cerebus 232 to Cerebus 265)

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC. P.O. BOX 1674, STATION C KITCHENER, ON N2G 4R2
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PRINTED IN CANADA BY PRENEY PRINT & LITHO INC. WINDSOR, ONTARIO

HSIFAN MARSHES
HSI FAN PLATEAU
TCARMIN PLATEAU
WALL of TSI (Western Portion)
Muresh
FELD RIVER
Leseer Pimina Range
Cirinist Farmlands
Cerebus & Jaka's progress
Cirinist Garrison
HA HA HA HA
HAHAHA WELL, THAT'S JUST THE WAY CEREBUS WAS WHEN HE WAS A KID...
HONESTLY, IF I HAD BEEN YOUR
LIKE THIS ONE TIME
CEREBUS WOULD'VE BEEN ABOUT... OH... TWELVE, MAYBE?

SEE, CEREBUS! MUM WOULDN'T YELL WHEN SHE WAS ANGRY. SHE'D JUST CLEAN REALLY LOUD..
HA HA HA
SERIOUS!
SO SHE WAS IN THE KITCHEN, CRASHING PLATES AROUND IN THE SINK, SLAMMING CUPBOARDS CLOSED
AND CEREBUS IS AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, READING (LIKE THIS)
AND WITHOUT LOOKING UP, CEREBUS SAYS:
"CEREBUS SENSES SOMETHING IS AMISS."
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
OH, THAT'S TERRIBLE
IF I WAS HER, I WOULD'VE SPANKED YOUR LITTLE GRAY BUM 'TIL IT WAS BLACK AND BLUE
OH, AYE
BUT YOU
'I WOULD MAKE A TERRIBLE MOTHER'
HA HA HA
YOU DON'T HAVE TO KEEP REMINDING ME, DEAR.
CEREBUS DOESN'T REMEMBER IT HIMSELF..
BUT IT'S ONE OF MUM'S FAVOURITE STORIES
SHE USED TO TELL THAT ONE TO EVERYBODY

WELL!
I COULD GO FOR ANOTHER GLASS OF WHITE WINE ALONG ABOUT NOW
AYE.
CEREBUS COULD GO FOR ANOTHER ALE ALONG ABOUT A WHILE AGO
GLUG. GLUG. GLUG.

HAHA HAH
?
HM?
OH! MIGGY MADE A FUNNY FACE WHILE YOU WERE GONE!
WHAT'S THE JOKE?
CEREBUS IS SORRY HE MISSED THAT
OH! THANKS!
?
YOU DIDN'T GET HIRED ON HERE AS A BARTENDER DID YOU?
NAY...
...BUT SOMEBODY SHOULD GET HIRED ON HERE AS A BARTENDER
CEREBUS MUST'VE SAID "EXCUSE ME!" FOUR TIMES...
AND HUMAND HIS PALS DIDN'T SO MUCH AS LOOK UP
EVEN WHEN CEREBUS WENT BEHIND THE BAR TO POUR THE DRINKS HIMSELF...
THEY JUST SAT THERE, PLAYING THEIR STUPID GAME.

DID YOU FIND OUT WHAT THE GAME IS, AT LEAST?
NAY.
THEY WERE ALL ARGUING ABOUT WHETHER SOMEONE'S WITCHWORD WAS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO CUT THROUGH THE MAGIC CHAINS THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAD USED TO BIND UP SOMEONE ELSE'S MOON CRYSTAL
SO ALL CEREBUS REALLY KNOWS ABOUT THE GAME FOR SURE
IS THAT IT'S STUPID?
WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY WOULD THINK ABOUT YOUR ENERGY GLOBES OR THE GIANT STONE THRUNK OR...?
THAT'S NOT VERY NICE
BUT
NAY! THAT STUFF IS ALL REAL... REAL AND DANGEROUS... AND AND POISONOUS
LIKE
!
LORD JULIUS.
HEY! I WAS JUST TEASING! YOU DON'T HAVE TO
NAY!
OUTSIDE! CEREBUS JUST SAW HIM!
YOU'RE KIDDING PLEEASE TELL ME YOU'RE KIDDING

KAKLAK
OH WHAT DOES IT MATTER ANYWAY -- I'LL JUST PICK A NAME ANY NAME!! LIKE- HERMANN GOTTLIEB THERE'S IT! THAT'S THE PERFECT NAME FOR A WAYWARD STRANGER WITHOUT A
JUST WHEN EVERYTHING WAS GOING SO WELL...
I KNOW THAT VOICE... IT'S
THAT VOICE.
IT'S YOU! THE BEAUTIFUL BLONDE WOMAN IN MY DREAMS
THE ONE WHO KEPT SAYING "DO NOT DESPAIR, WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS..."
" FOR I AM A CLOSE FEMALE RELATIVE AND WHEN YOU FIND ME, YOU'LL REMEMBER ALL THAT YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN "
OF COSS! THE MAZZEN MAGI! (OR WHATEVER IT IS YOU CALL THAT LONG, HEAVY THING THAT SWINGS AROUND ON A TURNIP BOAT)
A SHARP BLOW TO MY HEAD!
A SHARP BLOW TO YOUR HEAD?
NO THANKS I ALREADY HAD ONE.
YES! IT'S ALL COMING BACK TO ME NOW
YOU'RE MY NIECE JAKA
AND I'M YOUR KINDLY OLD UNCLE JULIUS
IN FACT -- heh-heh I REMEMBER EVERYTHING EXCEPT THE ANSWERS TO THOSE THREE SILLY QUESTIONS I TOLD YOU TO ASK ME TO MAKE SURE I'M NOT A LIKE-A-LOOK
WELL, NOW THAT THAT'S SETTLED
THAT ISN'T ?
UNH-UNH.
IF WE HURRY WE CAN JUST CATCH THE SUNDOWN EXPRESS TURNIP BOAT OUT OF MORESH...
...AND BE BACK IN PANU IN TIME FOR THE SWAMBERWAUP OLYMPICS I FORGOT TO ORGANIZE BEFORE I LEFT...

PLEASE...
WE JUST WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE
AYE!
GO ON!
BEAT IT!
SCRAM!
I GIVE UP.
WHO'S THE MOUTHY KID IN THE RABBIT SUIT?
CEREBUS?!
USED TO BE THE REAL LORD JULIUS' KITCHEN STAFF SUPERVISOR?
MOTHER OF MERCY!!
I'M HAVING A RELAPSE!
SPEAKING AS OUR FAMILY DOCTOR I FEEL IT'S ONLY FAIR TO WARN YOU THAT IF WE DON'T GET ME TO THAT TURNIP BOAT ON TIME, I CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE
YOU'RE GIVING ME A HEADACHE
AHA! YOU SEE?
HAVING FRITTERED AWAY PRECIOUS MOMENTS ARGUING ABOUT WHO IS OR ISN'T LORD JULIUS -- MY AMNESIA HAS NOW ENTERED THE INFECTIOUS STAGE
FIVE MORE MINUTES OF POINTLESS REPARTEE AND I'LL LAY EVEN ODDS NEITHER OF US WILL REMEMBER WHERE YOUR STAR-SHAPED BIRTHMARK IS...
STAR-SHAPED?

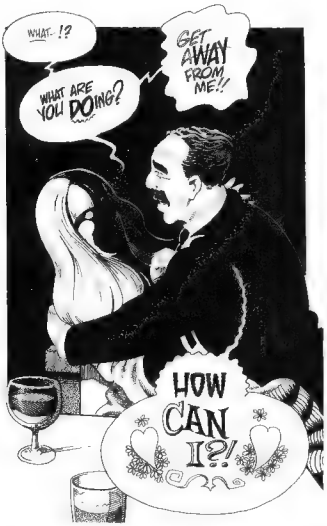
THE ONE UNDER YOUR BELLY-BUTTON?
OOPS
Flick Flick
SEE HEyuh, SUH! MAH FAMLY O'HNUH DEE-MANDS TO KNOWS EXACTLY HOW MUCH TA HIM HAVE YOU ALL SPENT UNDAH MAH FAY-VUH NIECE'S BELLY-BUTTON ?
AND REMEMBER-- YOUR ANSWER MUST BE IN THE FORM OF A QUESTION
ACTUALLY, CEREBUS KNOWS A GREAT CURE FOR MAGNESIA

YOU DO?
WHAT IS IT?
ANOTHER SHARP BLOW TO THE HEAD.
YOU DON'T SAY. WELL, IF I EVER COME DOWN WITH AMNESIA, I'LL HAVE TO GIVE THAT ONE A
OH, YOU MEAN AMNESIA..
LIKE I'VE
CEREBUS.
NO!
NO. HITTING.
CEREBUS?
IF YOU FOLKS WILL EXCUSE ME ..
I'VE SUDDENLY REMEMBERED THAT I HAVE A PRESSING SUBSEQUENT ENGAGEMENT
KA KLAK
CEREBUS!

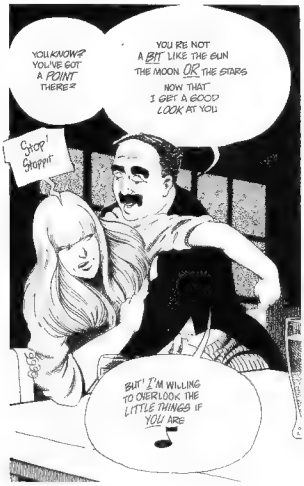
CEREBUS!
RUSTLE RUSTLE
HMM.
HONESTLY.
TELL ME, MISS V
HAS HE BEEN LIKE THIS THE WHOLE TIME YOU'VE BEEN WITH HIM?
NOT TALKING, HUH? WHAT A CLEVER LITTLE GIRL YA
?
RUSTLE RUSTLE

ALL RIGHT..
I ADMIT IT...
I'M NOT UNCLE JULIUS..
I..
I'M SO ASHAMED..
WHY..
IS IT HADN'T USED PERMANENT INK TO PUT ON MY MUSTACHE AND EYEBROWS?
I--
I'D WIPE THEM OFF THIS VERY M MUTE..
WELL..
THANK YOU FOR BEING HONEST
NOW, IF YOU'LL..
WHAT WAS IT THAT GAVE ME AWAY?
MY HAIR IS TOO WAVY-- THAT WAS IT WASN'T IT?
UNCLE JULIUS HASN'T PAINTED HIS MUSTACHE ON FOR YEARS
HE WAS A REAL ONE NOW
OH, HE DOES, DOES HE?
HEH HEH HEH
WELL? THAT'S A GOOD ONE ON ME, ISN'T IT
IMAGINE
ME TRYING TO
SAY--
I HOPE YOU DON'T THINK FOR ONE MINUTE THAT THE ONLY REASON I WAS TRY NG TO FOOL YOU WAS
WELL
heh-heh SO I COULD GET PLUSH ACCOMMODATIONS -- LIKE YOU GET -- OR SO I COULD GET GOURMET FOOD LIKE YOU GET --
OR-OR-SO I COULD GET WAITED ON HAND-AND-FOOT
LIKE YOUR HAND AND FOOT GET

THE THOUGHT DID CROSS MY MIND
YOU KNOW?
NOW THAT I SAY IT OUT LOUD LIKE THAT..
OH WHO AM I FOOLING?
THAT
THAT WASN'T THE REAL REASON AT ALL
IT WASN'T HUH?
SO WHAT WAS THE "REAL REASON"?
AKA I LOVE you
What?!
I'VE NEVER SAID THAT TO A WOMAN BEFORE
NOT LOUD ENOUGH SO SHE COULD HEAR ME ANYWAY
BUT IT'S TRUE
I LOVE YOU WITH EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING
AND I PRACTICALLY LIVE ON OAT BRAN, SO THAT'S REALLY SAYING SOMETHING


WHAT..!?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
GET AWAY FROM ME!!
HOW CAN I?!

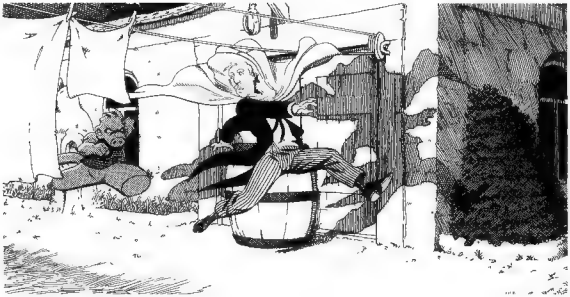
YOU'RE THE SUN, the MOON and the STARS TO ME.....
YOU'RE MAD!


YOU KNOW? YOU'VE GOT A POINT THERE.
YOU'RE NOT A BIT LIKE THE SUN THE MOON OR THE STARS
NOW THAT I GET A GOOD LOOK AT YOU
STOP! STOPPIT!
BUT I'M WILLING TO OVERLOOK THE LITTLE THINGS IF YOU ARE

PUFF
PUFF
CEREBUS LOST HIM OUT IN

SAY! DON'T YOU KNOW YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO KNOCK BEFORE YOU ENTER A ROOM?
FOOM!?
OOPS.
CEREBUS!
ZOOM
ZOOM!
What!!
ERT.
DON'T..
DON'T HIT HIM TOO HARD..

!
FLOOR
SKRICH
SKRICH
KRIK
KRAK.

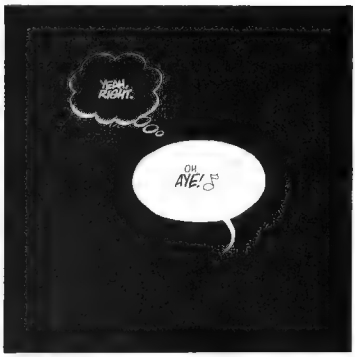


THUD
?
PLOP

WHAT.
SEEMS TO BE
THE PROBLEM
HERE.

THE ONE WITH THE PAINTED-ON MUSTACHE AND EYEBROWS -- HE'S THE TROUBLE-MAKER. THE OTHER ONE IS MY BOYFRIEND.
YES, PRINCESS
MOST OF THE TIME
HE'S NO TROUBLE AT ALL
GAY. YOU WOULD YOU MIND NOT SQUEEZING SO
OW
OH,
HA.
HA.
HA.
OH, PLEASE
JUST CALL ME "JAKA"
WHAT A DAY. HA HA
YOU SAID IT
SO WHAT'LL THEY DO TO H.M.?

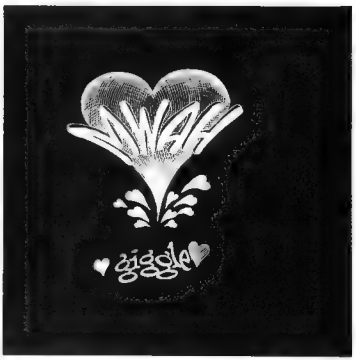
THEY'LL JUST TAKE HIM A FEW MILES AWAY AND LET HIM GO.. WITH A WARNING NOT TO BOTHER US AGAIN.

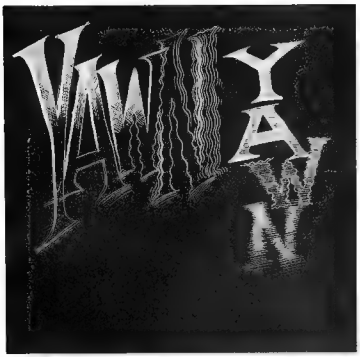

YEAH, RIGHT.
OH, AYE!

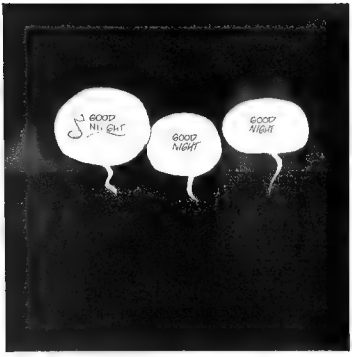
giggle
"Just another amazing adventure"
"of Cerdus and Jaka"
"On the Road!"

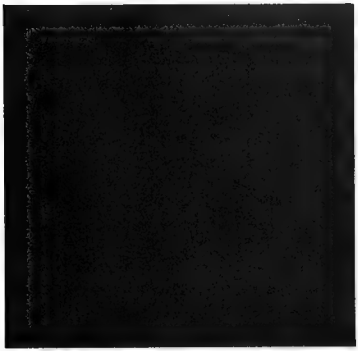
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

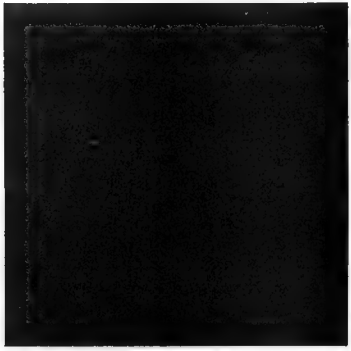
MWah
MWah
MWah
MMMMMMMM

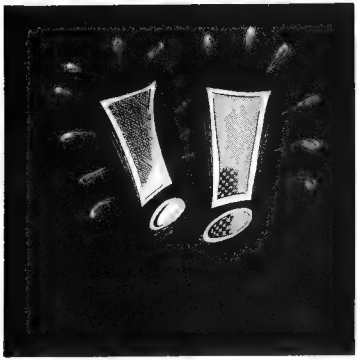

MWah
giggle


YAWN


GOOD NIGHT
GOOD NIGHT
GOOD NIGHT







SKTCH

SAY - WOULD YOU TWO MIND SQUEEZING OVER JUST A BIT?
ONCE I START TOSSING AND TURNING I'M GOING TO NEED THE EXTRA ROOM.
CEREBUS?
AYE?
HIT HIM, REALLY HARD!
LISTEN! THERE'S NO NEED TO BE HASTY ABOUT THIS!
ZOOM!
USE SOMETHING HEAVY!
LIKE A CHAIR LEG!
ZOOM!

AARDVARK COMMENT

Dear Dave,

No small talk, just some random thoughts that I can no longer submerge following #223.

On pages 20-1 in #223 we are treated to another display of the bonfire bacchanal first witnessed in *Guys* pages 170-1. Is this a "verbatim" version of events (i.e., they are really having an orgy out there), or, as I suspect, is it one of those events filtered through Cerebus' perceptions in which we can never know what truly happened (in faithful post-modernist style)? In support of the latter theory, we see the last image of revelry through a window back at the pub.

"I am not Rick. I have little else to say about the character except that he is the nearest I will ever come to the portrayal of a good and thoroughly decent human being, completely without guile or malice." (The introduction of *Jaka's Story*.) Now, when I first read this, my immediate thought was: Okay, Dave's saying quit bugging me by constantly asking if I'm Rick. So, is Joanne's "The way I pictured (Dave), he looked exactly like you." (#223, page 10) a reflection of this? Are you trying to anticipate the fresh flood of mail asking if Rick is meant to be you? Or perhaps a metafictional rumination on the nature of being a writer and creator, and the scrutiny you're under? Either way, a deft touch.

With regard to #223's letters page, would you mind defining how gratification is different from happiness? Only, can one not achieve happiness through gratification (via pleasure)? Is gratification not responsible for art (i.e., creators gratifying their artist impulse to create) and thus providing a conducive effect for society?

In short, do you refer to gratification as the sole pursuit of indulging one's little vices to the exclusion of more fulfilling (whatever that means) endeavours?

Similarly, could I try to analyse "The World of Dave Sim" a little closer — in particular, the role of emotion with regard to decision making. In #207 you say, "I don't think emotion is a sensible thing upon which to base a decision." I interpret this as "I make my decisions based on reason, which brings me happiness/satisfaction/fulfil my muse." Is this a fair judgement? If so, then does not the "pursuit of happiness" lead inevitably to decisions being made with happiness paramount, and where one is in danger of an emotion — happiness — dictating judgement? Where do you draw the line? Where can you draw the line?

And if that wasn't enough, here comes the part of the letter you may have been expecting since #222, namely, Reason vs. Wisdom.

Now, you say "Wisdom supersedes Reason" — and you'll get no argument from me. However, I can't help thinking (which is as near to a confession of guilt that one can find in this day and age) that Wisdom is merely Reason proved right by the cold analysis of history. May I use your assertion, "The Treaty of Versailles was a Reasonable document, but very, very unWise. Lacking the least basics of human compassion, it created Hitler."? Now, a general historical consensus has begun to emerge which sees Hitler's rise to power as being an event discrete to the conditions of Versailles; it is all too easy to imagine Hitler coming to power even if Versailles had been more lenient. If Germany had been less harshly punished, perhaps this would have encouraged more autocratic and semi-autocratic regimes into pursuing what was a viable means of foreign policy on the strength of the example set. In 1914, there was no Wise solution available — simply what was most Reasonable. And the Versailles which did emerge was, however unfortunate, one of the most Reasonable alternatives.

Your opinion is that "The Constitution of the United States of America is Wise, *Das Kapital* is Reasonable." I fully expect that this is your own personal decision and that you have reached this conclusion from rational thought. Even if I disagree, I would respect not only your opinion, but your right to hold that opinion. Nevertheless, I disagree. The U.S. Constitution allowed Nixon and the Vietnam war to happen, neither of which were particularly wise. One could argue that those were the result of individuals and not the system itself; fine, although in the case of Vietnam, I'm not sure that a state dedicated to the free market is not setting itself up to protect the international market, even in defiance of the wishes of the native people. But if you take that explanation, that it is the people inside the system who are to be accountable for how such a system behaves, then one simply cannot attack socialism. Shit, even Fascism comes out looking good under this argument.

In conclusion, I think one cannot make Wise decisions. One makes a decision that is Reasonable and the outcome will determine if it was Wise. Or: there are no simple answers (both work).

Guys was a great read (I was curious as to how you intended to reproduce the covers and inside-covers) and has edged in my personal Top Three (after *Reads* and *High Society*). It also seems a very accessible volume in a style similar to other books on the market. I'm thinking this could be *the* introduction volume to new *Cerebus* readers (are you hearing this, Stephen and Mark?) — the male ones at least.

Tell Gerhard he deserves a pay raise after the cover of #208.

P. Gerald Williams
125 White Lion Park
Malmesbury, Wiltshire
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SN16 0QR

No, they were really having an orgy out there — at least in the inner circle closest to the fire. If you're going to build up internal pressure in a matriarchal society and blow off steam four times a year, in my view you really

have to Blow. Off. Steam. One of the reasons the current feminist/matriarchal axis is running out of gas. They forgot the sybaritic late '60s environment that is their only natural medium of existence.

Hey, thanks for bringing up the "I am not Rick" thing (the big reason I chose to print your letter). Yes, I really did anticipate a new flood of "Dave as Rick" letters coming in and, more perniciously, the widespread perception that that was the case. It is critically — CRITICALLY — important to understanding what the entirety of the Cerebus *story line is about that the reader has carved into his or her frontal lobes: "Dave is not Rick," also "Dave is not Cerebus," also "There is no real-life Jaka." Anything else is a complete and utter misunderstanding of what I'm saying. Not that it will stop anyone from thinking any or all of those three things, but it does bear repeating and repeating and repeating. So, thanks for the opportunity. Folks? I am not Rick. I am not Cerebus. There is no real-life Jaka.*

Gratification versus happiness. I guess the misunderstanding results from seeing the latter as being a superior or purer form of the former. Which is not my particular take on it. If I am at peace with myself, neither exhilarated nor depressed, but in a state of great equanimity and perfectly content at work and at home and out socializing (as I happen to be here in early June), then I count that as gratification. I am not happy per se. I am gratified. My life is gratifying in all of its aspects. Happiness, as I see it, is a little too "up." When I am happy or Happy, it is just too ephemeral to last or maintain. Inevitably after happy or Happy comes bored or Bored — the need for another happy or Happy fix. In my life, that's when I make mistakes -- going after Happy. At which point I can't be gratified since the Pursuit of Happiness, to me, ranges from being diametrically opposed to being tangential to gratification. Gratification I see as being content with what I have, fully awake and fully aware of my place in the grand scheme of things (i.e., right here) and fundamentally accepting of those three conditions. If I jump too high trying to grab some happy or Happy and miss, I plummet through the fragile membrane of gratification into the lower reaches of boredom or Boredom, and (depending on how foolishly high I jumped after happy or Happy) I can plunge right through boredom or Boredom into depression or Depression.

In short, gratification seems Wise to me, the Pursuit of Happiness reasonable in the jump mode and unwise in the plummet mode.

On to the Treaty of Versailles:

I would agree that it was the most reasonable choice at the time, and I could even be persuaded to call it the wisest choice at the time. Which, to me, only serves to point up one of the central follies/conceits of the human condition. We spend too much time believing, as a society, that "Now we are Wise" at whatever juncture in history. In 1914, I don't believe we were Wise or wise, or intelligent, or (if push comes to shove) even especially clever. I don't think that condition has changed overly much. We are still learning, and what we had not learned in 1914-1918 we paid a very dear price for in the College of Really Hard Knocks of 1939-1945. Just as what we didn't learn in 1939-1945 we paid a less dear price for in Korea and Vietnam. As a society we paid a very small price in those two venues, comparatively speaking. The highest price was paid by those who had learned the least from 1939-1945 — the emergent American Empire and those countries and leaders predisposed to marching in lock step behind the Pax Americana Marching Band.

Now, where I take issue with you is in saying that the Constitution of the United States of America made Vietnam and Richard Nixon possible. The American People (in my view) made Vietnam and Richard Nixon possible. The Constitution, as it was intended to do, made them temporary aberrations. The Constitution made Vietnam a fourteen-year cul-de-sac and Richard Nixon a six-year cul-de-sac. The only previous worldwide empire, the British Empire, having no comparably wise constitution as its foundation, was able to engage in the Hundred Years War, in comparison with which, to me, Vietnam was a block party that got a little out of hand. Likewise Queen Victoria reigning for sixty years and perceiving of herself as God's Anointed on Earth versus Dick Nixon strutting and fretting his six years on the world's stage. Any two-hundred-year-old document which can limit a worldwide-armed-to-the-fucking-teeth Empire to dog-and-pony shows like Operation Desert Storm and four- and eight-year standup comedians is, to me, a self-evidently Wise Document.

And since I've already rattled on at considerable length, hey, why stop now? To me, the United States Constitution, having limited the American Empire to such minor bits of mischief as the Gulf War, is now able to direct more subtle developments in the slow rise to wisdom. The best current example that I can think of is Bill Clinton's women troubles. I don't think there's a snowball's chance in hell of his facing impeachment or anything on the order of what Dick Nixon faced — for the simple reason that the Constitution was designed to arrest and curtail abuse and (more to the point) excessive use of power and to protect the individual from the unwarranted intrusion of the State into his or her life. It is only microcosmic feminist thinking that would equate Bill Clinton getting a blowjob in the Oval Office with the excesses of Watergate. Microcosmic in the sense of "small-minded," "limted," "narrow." In short, Unwise. Not inexplicable (to me, anyway) but very, very Unwise. It seems to me that it is an implication of feminist "thinking," which is largely if not completely atheistic. Speaking as a Deist, a firm believer in the One God, anything which I do where there is only myself, or myself and one other individual, involved is in the jurisdiction of morality. My moral choices are something that are between me and God, and I take it as a given that, as an imperfect sinner, I will have to account for them and be brought to account for them after I die — not to mention having to endure the repercussions of my ethically unsound choices here in this Vale of Tears. I think likewise with Bill Clinton (or any other political leader, for that matter). It is only because feminists are atheistic by nature, in my view, that they are predisposed to the natural conceit of the atheistic. That is to say, being unable to conceive of anything larger than themselves, they see it as

their duty to take the place of the God they don't believe in, punishing those who transgress against their own notions of what constitutes an ethically unsound choice. Talk about not knowing your place! To me, that is. They are frustrated by the fact that two-person episodes behind closed doors founder on "he said, she said," when, to me, they would be far better served by examining their own motives in attempting to set themselves up as judge, jury, and executioner based on hearsay evidence. To me, if Bill Clinton is getting a blowjob in the Oval Office, that's really Bill's business. I would consider it a very ethically unsound choice, particularly if the "blower" has been led to believe that there is some quid pro quo involved or (even worse) if there is a quid pro quo involved. I would assume (as I do with any ethically unsound choice) that there will be negative repercussions. JFK's excruciating back pain as the net effect of his unconscionable womanizing, as an example. But in my view, human beings don't have to volunteer *to be the* instruments *of those negative repercussions. To me, they are built into the fabric of existence. For all I know, Bill Clinton has a torturous case of hemorrhoids that makes all of his sitting-in on meetings a torment to him exactly to the extent that he has been a torment to Paula whatserface and Monica whoozits, or that it has driven a wedge between himself and his daughter that will never be removed. It's none of my business, to me. It's between Bill and God.*

Very glad to hear that Guys *struck such a resonant chord with you. At the moment, it is definitely our fastest-selling trade paperback. On the graphs that Ger keeps to track inventory, the supply is dropping in a very straight, steep line.*

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Dave:

It's nice to see someone providing a forum for The Inadequate Males' Club of North America to vent, but at what point are you going to pull the rug out from underneath these saps? How long can these disenfranchised fellers keep up this intellectual blowjob, Dave? Am I the only person out here wondering why, after vilifying the "Woman" (as if such a characterization is even valid) to such a laughable extent as to presuppose that the "Feminine" is an Alien Force, after making "Her" a convenient scapegoat for all those embarrassing High School Locker Room moments, yea, after all this…they cannot refrain from discussing "Her" rampant evil? If you've got such problems with women (and, I might be wrong, but I think it's probably just one or two women that you're generalizing to be representative of every single woman in the Universe), WHY is "She" still the ultimate focus of attention? Why can't the fixated drag the camera away from the wreckage? Hell, why not bring a nice young man home to the folks, gents? Maybe one who reads *Cerebus*, especially: that should resolve the alienation you seem to be desperately attempting to pour out in this letters page. But if all this ranting makes you feel bigger, hey…go for it, guys. Playing Adam ("The Woman made me do it!") seems like a pretty one-dimensional role to dredge for such a short life, especially when the God you're supplicating (Dave?) is such a Trickster.

To Dave specifically: Your mode of storytelling seems to be much less consistent than the recent past, so much so that I seem to be floundering in the images, unable to grasp even relatively the meaning of your intent with *Rick's Story*. I was wondering if this was intentional, or if you're just not as focused at this point as you were at others?

Pete Prochilo
76 Merrill Rd.
Clifton, NJ 07012

Listen, Pete. To begin with, I don't think that there's anything wrong with offering a different view of women than the one currently in vogue of caring, loving warrior goddesses who raise children and conquer the corporate world without so much as...I'm sorry?

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Dave:

Having promised myself never to write any more letters, I just wanted to break that promise to temper the ranting of my last correspondence with the information I got from your latest issue. Apparently, you are handling the storytelling elements more adroitly that I had perceived: it seemed to me less forward than, say, *Guys* (I can't stop praising it, I know) and when it comes down to it, I was more in tune with such a rhythm than with *Rick's Story*. I keep confusing them as one sequence, more or less, probably because of the setting. The last issue woke me out of the stupor. Keep it up.

I think you are dealing explicitly in Rick with the collective character of the cabal of sophomoric misogynists who have rallied around your letters page, albeit I don't know where you're going with it.

And "Mama's Boys" is provocative, given that the world is able to be known through Reason and not as absurd as it seems, and that the idyllic patriarchal state (the "pecking order," etc.) ever really existed. The essay, methinks, says a lot more about Dave Sim than it does about Mama's Boys.

Good show, and good luck.

Pete Prochilo

Oh, sorry, Pete. I didn't mean to interrupt you there. Glad you're enjoying the book, and I hope you enjoy what I do with Rick through the rest of the series.

❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄ ❄

Dear Dave:

I just read issue 229, which I only got last weekend. New issues used to appear near the beginning of each month, but then after the distribution shakedown of a year or so ago they've come seemingly later and later.

Has anyone else but me thought of the pun "Davis ex machina"? Being a fan of reflexivity and permeable

fourth walls of all sorts, I find your presence as a character in the story to be pretty fascinating. First there was Victor Davis in *Reads*, then Dave in *Minds*, and now definitely Dave Sim in *Rick's Story*. I'm a bit more discombobulated because of the Tarim/God thing going on with Rick, too. Not only is there, in the story, God with a capital G, don't-call-Him-"Tarim" God, but there's also Dave, creator of *Cerebus* and all things in the world he lives in.

My new game is trying to suss out whether you are really just leaving things up to Cerebus to decide what to do with his life or whether you still have things plotted and planned out in advance. Or maybe you had it figured out through "the fourth part of the third big book" (or whatever) but after that decided to let things go as they may (or may not, as the case seems to be).

Much as I am inclined these days to avoid reading parallels to my own life in the Cerebus story line, your conversation re: Peter's Place/the tavern struck a chord anyway. I wrote to you a few months ago (fragment you may recall: my friends and I ending up in Atascadero, CA instead of "going to the DISH") and described a pile of unseen, unpublished work I've been amassing for the past few years. You must have actually read my letter because you sent me a copy of the self-publishing guide even though my letter really said nothing about comics. (Thank you.)

Anyway, to get back to the point, most of that material has been composed and drawn here, where I'm sitting now — in a little coffee shop created out of what used to be the alleyway between two other buildings on "The Drag," the area of Guadeloupe St. that borders the University of Texas campus. It used to be called INSOMNIA and now it's called METRO, and I've been coming here at least once and sometimes twice a day (it's open 24 hrs.) for quite a long time now. In fact, I've been here about one year longer than Cerebus has been hanging around in that tavern. *Reads* was still going on when I found this place. (I read *Cerebus* here, too.)

As you can imagine, there are times of late when I'm sick to death of this place. I wake up in the morning and say, "I've had it. I'm not going there again. Not today, especially." Sure enough I end up there anyway. I find I can get work done here; for some odd reason, the brick walls, wooden floors, solid metal furniture, and buzz of conversation create the perfect environment for me to concentrate. That and there's nothing else to do here, so I might as well take out my pen and get something accomplished.

Unlike you, I am careful to appreciate this place while it's here and while I'm here and while I've got it. I don't think I'll end up with a regretfulness that I failed to soak in what was really swell about it while it was here for me. This is the place where I got rid of my ten thousand bad drawings and started to see the good ones appear, and other things like that.

However, it has been feeling like it's time to move on. I was 23 when I started coming here, and now I'm 27. There's a big difference between those ages, especially when it's (now) primarily a student hangout and the kids look younger and younger and younger. Your latest issue jolted me to think maybe I'd prefer to willfully choose to walk away from this place before it is yanked away. I have in some sense been waiting for something to replace it with, some reason to be so busy I don't have time to show up here.

Anyway, I noticed that you're doing some fantastic comics work these days! I might go so far as to say you're in some kind of prime, would you agree? Pity Cerebus seems to be locked into one small space (more of a hell for Gerhard I suppose — and he thought the throne room for a year was bad news. By the way, that was the inside of a submarine, wasn't it? I forget the reference, but I know you used that as an example somewhere a long time ago), but you've been able to play with split and overlapping panels, really hashing out some brilliant executions of timing, of expressions and glances, of just using the medium in a really expressive, unique way. Certainly you've done more with dialogue balloons than anyone else I can think of, especially in the last few years.

My favorite page of 228 was the "Take Cerebus usss us uss us with you..." one. To have all of that going on, and intertwined just so, and with meanings layered into meanings driving the way it was laid out and illustrated — well, that was great work. You've also become quite a master of integrating text (in various formats) into the book. It makes your first, early attempts look like — well, like first, early attempts.

It just seems like these are the things you're spending a lot of time trying to do just right, and yet most readers won't remember to tell you "good job" about. So, good job. I'm enjoying the book immensely these days, strangely enough. I certainly don't find it boring! Even the "frome the table to the windowe fifteen paces, and windowe to the firste seate, etc., etc." issue I thought was well worth my time to pore over. I probably will never have the stamina to read all of that ever again, but if I hadn't done it at all I would have missed the lines about the "latter daies of cerebvs" being fulfilled, which certainly puts some suspense back into things, and some hope that he will get out of the damn tavern and back to having exciting ha-ha adventures.

Sometime, back in December I think, I wrote up another letter to you, and then prepared an elaborate manuscript (sort of my version of a *Cerebus* "phone book") to send you, containing some of this alleged work I've been allegedly doing in this proven coffee shop. Just as I was going to send it, I heard that there was a postal strike going on in Canada. Then when that got settled, there was a horrendous ice storm, apparently. So, it's still sitting on my shelf, and now I'm feeling like it's such a nice package (and one-of-a-kind, too) that I may just keep it for myself, which is silly because I've already read it.

Well, drop me a note (yeah, right) if you'd like to see it anyway. Perhaps I can part with it.

I can't wait for the *Rick's Story* "phone book." In fact, if you're going to do a signed, numbered edition at first, I'd like number 141. It's a number that's haunted me for some years. I used to get spooked by it (What does it MEAN? Why do I see it ALL THE TIME?), but now I just find it amusing. (It even appears on the cover of the *Melmoth* "phone book," as I recall.) Good old one-four-

one...Does that number mean anything in your numerology, Dave?

I'm sure I'll see you in person again someday. There's an air of inevitability to it, somehow.

Sincerely,
J. Robinson Wheeler

P.S. Enclosed is something a friend e-mailed to me a while back. There's a good chance that it's apocryphal and not "actually turned in" to a real English professor, but it's pretty funny anyway.

Hey, thanks for the great letter. No, I really don't get a lot of feedback these days, so it's nice to know that you're really enjoying the book. Because of the structure of Rick's Story *(which really continues through the rest of the story line), of creating an impression of what the story is about in any given issue and then fundamentally changing that impression in the subsequent issue, I think there are probably a lot of half-finished letters out there that looked pointless to their authors when the new issue came in. My attitude towards these "radio silence" periods has been, for some time, that either everyone is enjoying it too much to write or I'm really about to lose everyone as a reader. If it's the former case, I'd better bear down and make sure I don't screw it up. If it's the latter, I'd better bear down before I lose any more readers. In either case I have to bear down, so it hardly seems worth trying to figure out which one it is.*

Ger and I both enjoyed the e-mail piece you forwarded, so I'm running it here:

RECEIVED FROM AN ENGLISH PROFESSOR:

You know that book *Men are from Mars, Women from Venus*? Well, here's a prime example of that. This assignment was actually turned in by two of my English students: Rebecca — last name deleted, and Gary — last name deleted.

English 441 SMU Creative Writing
Prof. Miller
In-class Assignment for Wednesday

Today we will experiment with a new form called the tandem story. The process is simple. Each person will pair off with the person sitting to his or her immediate right. One of you will then write the first paragraph of a short story. The partner will read the first paragraph and then add another paragraph to the story, and so on back and forth. Remember to re-read what has been written each time in order to keep the story coherent. The story is over when both agree a conclusion has been reached.

At first, Laurie couldn't decide which kind of tea she wanted. The chamomile, which used to be her favorite for lazy evenings at home, now reminded her too much of Carl, who once said, in happier times, that he liked chamomile. But she felt she must now, at all costs, keep her mind off Carl. His possessiveness was suffocating, and if she thought about him too much her asthma started acting up again. So chamomile was out of the question.

❖

Meanwhile, Advance Sergeant Carl Harris, leader of the attack squadron now in orbit over Skylon 4, had more important things to think about than the neuroses of an air-headed asthmatic bimbo named Laurie, with whom he had spent one sweaty night over a year ago. "A.S. Harris to Geostation 17," he said into his transgalactic communicator. "Polar orbit established. No sign of resistance so far..." But before he could sign off, a bluish particle beam flashed out of nowhere and blasted a hole through his ship's cargo bay. The jolt from the direct hit sent him flying out of his seat and across the cockpit.

❖

He bumped his head and died almost immediately, but not before he felt one last pang of regret for psychically brutalizing the one woman who had ever had feelings for him. Soon afterwards, Earth stopped its pointless hostilities towards the peaceful farmers of Skylon 4. "Congress Passes Law Permanently Abolishing War and Space Travel," Laurie read in her newspaper one morning. The news simultaneously excited her and bored her. She stared out the window, dreaming of her youth, when the days had passed unhurriedly and carefree, with no newspapers to read, no television to distract her from her sense of innocent wonder at all the beautiful things around her. "Why must one lose one's innocence to become a woman?" she pondered wistfully.

❖

Little did she know, but she had less than 10 seconds to live. Thousands of miles above the city, the Anu'udrian mothership launched the first of its lithium fusion missiles. The dim-witted wimp peaceniks who pushed the Unilateral Aerospace Disarmament Treaty through Congress had left Earth a defenseless target for the hostile alien empires who were determined to destroy the human race. Within two hours after the passage of the treaty the Anu'udrian ships were on course for Earth, carrying enough firepower to pulverize the entire planet. With no one to stop them, they swiftly initiated their diabolical plan. The lithium fusion missile entered the atmosphere unimpeded. The President, in his top-secret mobile submarine headquarters on the ocean floor off the coast of Guam, felt the inconceivably massive explosion which vaporized Laurie and 85 million other Americans. The President slammed his fist on the conference table. "We can't allow this! I'm going to veto that treaty! Let's blow 'em out of the sky!"

❖

This is absurd. I refuse to continue this mockery of literature. My writing partner is a violent, chauvinistic, semi-literate adolescent.

❖

Yeah? Well, you're a self-centered tedious neurotic whose attempts at writing are the literary equivalent of Valium.

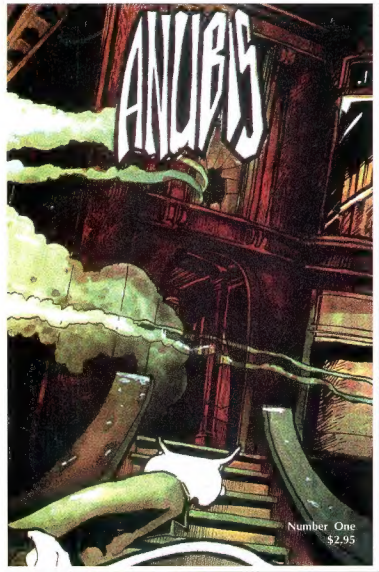
❖

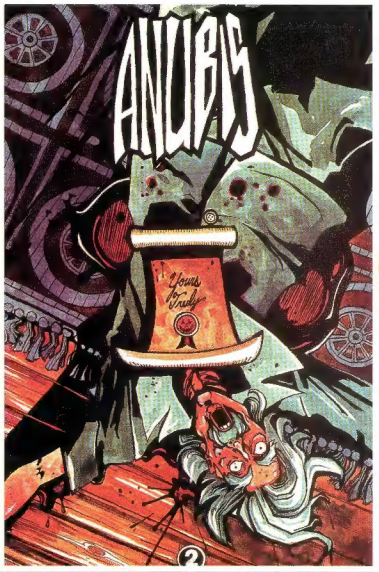
Asshole.

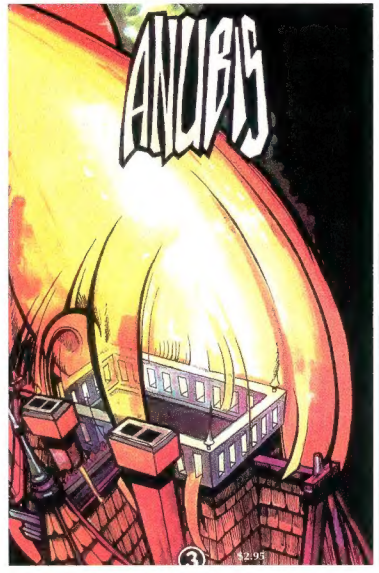
❖

Bitch.

Hope you all enjoyed that one as much as Gerhard and I did.







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